





## THE OPIUM CONTROVERSY.

THE controversy regarding the opium trade between India and China, which has gone on for many years, has lately been renewed with increased vigour, and it seems probable that the question will be again pressed upon the attention of Parliament at no very distant date. It formed the subject of an animated, if one-sided, series of speeches at a meeting at the Mansion House in October last. It has since been debated before the Society of Arts. It has been discussed in the pages of this review by Sir Rutherford Alcock on the one side, and by Mr. Storrs Turner, the Secretary to the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade, on the other side. It has been dealt with in a series of letters addressed by Sir George Birdwood to the *Times*, and in a pamphlet by Deputy-Surgeon-General Moore, in both of which the medical aspect of the question is very fully treated by men who have had opportunities—in the case of Dr. Moore exceptional opportunities—of observing the effects of the use of opium upon Asiatics. At a meeting held at Manchester in the latter part of last month, the Bishop of that diocese, one of the most practical men on the Episcopal bench, threw the weight of his opinion on the side of the Anti-opiumists; while on the same occasion Professor Goldwin Smith adduced a new argument against the trade by drawing attention to the large influx of Chinese into the great cities of the United States, of Canada, and of Australia, which has taken place in recent years, and inquiring whether these immigrants were to be allowed to bring with them what he described as a ‘hideous and very infectious vice,’ and whether ‘the blame and the disgrace of that should rest upon England.’ And lastly, the whole system under which the cultivation, manufacture, and export of opium are regulated in India, and the arguments for non-interference, have been most ably set forth in one of the chapters of the valuable treatise on Indian Finance and Public Works lately written by Sir John Strachey and General Richard Strachey. With such apparently ample materials for forming a judgment in the case, it may naturally be asked what need there is for any more writing on the subject. It may be said that the preliminary pleadings at all events are now complete, and that all that remains is to submit the case to the decision of the only tribunal which is competent to settle it. Nevertheless, as I venture to think that there are certain considerations which have not

been sufficiently kept in view in the discussion of this important question, and that there is still a very general misconception in regard to facts which have an important bearing upon it, I desire to offer a few remarks by way of supplement to the arguments already urged by the opponents of the agitation now in progress.

It is impossible not to respect the motives which actuate many of the abolitionists in the course they are taking in this matter. In their opinion the trade is 'altogether and unequivocally abominable;' the cultivation and sale of opium under the immediate direction of the Government of India are 'degrading and ignominious.' They regard the trade as a 'national abomination.' They consider that it is 'instrumental in effecting the physical ruin and moral degradation of multitudes of Chinese, and is a hindrance both to legitimate commerce and to the spread of Christianity.' They maintain that the immorality of the trade 'is admitted even by those who for financial reasons desire its continuance;' and they hold that the feeling of the country is now so convinced as to the wrong which is being done, that they have only to address to the Government a powerful representation on the subject to ensure that the wrong-doing shall be no longer tolerated. It cannot be a matter for surprise that persons entertaining these views should make every effort for the suppression of the thing which they denounce, and should look with confidence to receiving such a support from the public opinion of the country as will compel the Government to give effect to their views.

Nor can we suppose that if it can be proved that these views are really founded upon well-established facts, the nation will long hesitate to insist upon the abandonment of a trade which has been shown to be alike disgraceful to the British name and repugnant to the principles of civilisation. If it can be proved that the evils resulting from the opium trade are of that undoubted and exceptional character which the Anti-opiumists assert, and that there is a reasonable probability that those evils can be suppressed by measures within the power of the British Government, we may be certain that the thing will have to be done, however great may be the difficulties, and however serious the sacrifice which it will involve. If, on the other hand, it can be established to the satisfaction of persons of ordinary intelligence that the evils of the use of opium, as practised by the Chinese, are not appreciably greater than, if indeed they are as great as, the evils resulting from the trade in wine and spirits and beer, from which England draws a revenue of not less than 27,000,000*l.*; and further, that the notions which commonly obtain in regard to the past relations between this country and China are, if not absolutely incorrect, very greatly exaggerated, then I submit that it will be the duty of those who are now denouncing the opium traffic to desist from this agitation, and to recognise the fact that

the question of abolishing that traffic has passed out of the range of practical politics. It is sometimes forgotten that in the cry of justice to the Chinese the duty of dealing justly by the people of India is apt to be overlooked. It will hardly be denied that the loss to India which the abolition of the opium trade must entail would be a very serious one, or that the measure would greatly intensify the difficulties, already sufficiently great, of our Indian administration; but it may be doubtful whether many of those who join in the outcry against the trade fully realize the consequences which must ensue to India from its abolition.

During the last twenty years the opium trade has supplied to the Indian treasury a net revenue of 134,500,000*l.* During the thirty-nine years which have elapsed since the close of the first war with China, the net annual receipts from the trade have risen from a little over 2,000,000*l.* in the financial year 1843-4 to 8,466,000*l.* out of a total net revenue of 49,131,000*l.* in the financial year which ended on the 31st of March last. The benefits which the trade has conferred upon the people of India are very great. To say nothing of the employment which the cultivation and manufacture have given to a portion of the population in those districts in which opium is grown, the financial result of the trade has enabled the Government to carry out numerous beneficial improvements and reforms, which without this aid it would have been impossible to effect. It is not too much to affirm that without the opium revenue the education of the natives of India could never have been attempted upon its present scale; the funds available for the administration of justice must have been largely curtailed; the cheap postage and the telegraph could not have been introduced; the police must have been left upon its old inefficient footing; the expenditure upon public works must have been very much less than it has been; and in various other matters reforms which have not only improved the administration, but have benefited the revenues, and have thus paved the way for further improvements, could not have been carried out. India is notoriously a poor country, but possessing many undeveloped sources of wealth, and owning, in the capacity of certain tracts for the production of opium, a property which it can ill afford to lose. To suppress the cultivation of opium in India—which, it is admitted on all hands, is the only effectual mode of suppressing the importation of Indian opium into China—would be tantamount, as Mr. Grant Duff observed when the question was under investigation before the Indian Finance Committee of the House of Commons in 1871, to depriving the people of India of an estate worth from 7,000,000*l.* to 8,000,000*l.* per annum. It is hardly necessary to observe that such a measure would be entirely opposed to sound economic principles, and would inflict a very serious injury upon the interests of our great Indian dependency, both from a political and from an administrative point of view; for if we abolish the opium revenue,



the deficit will have to be met, either by levying additional taxes, or by reducing expenditure, or by adopting both these methods of restoring a financial equilibrium. It is very easy to assert, as was asserted by the late Lord Mayor at the meeting at the Mansion House, that 'the financial difficulty could be got over if the Government would only deal with the question and do what is right;' but a loss of revenue amounting to 7,000,000*l.* or 8,000,000*l.* is not to be met by vague assertions of this kind. It is idle to suggest that the loss to India can be made up by a grant from the imperial treasury. The 20,000,000*l.* grant in connection with the extinction of colonial slavery may be, as Mr. Storrs Turner calls it, 'a glorious precedent,' but it would take many times 20,000,000*l.* to compensate India for the loss of the opium revenue. The grant made to India in aid of the expenses of the Afghan war is certainly not a precedent, for that grant was made expressly on the ground that the war had been carried on for imperial, and not only for Indian objects. It is safe to affirm that no wise statesman would introduce a policy so prejudicial to the financial interests of both countries as that of teaching India to look to the imperial exchequer in time of need. The loss of revenue, if it must be incurred, must fall upon India, and upon India alone. Unless we are prepared to face serious political dangers, we cannot make any such additions to the present taxation of India as would be necessary to supply the place of the opium revenue; nor can we reduce our expenditure by several millions, unless we make up our minds for a far less effective system of administration than that which at present exists and constitutes the best justification of our presence in that country. The cost of governing India has increased with the growth of the empire and with the sense of our responsibilities. If that expense is to be materially reduced, we must curtail our establishments in every direction. The strength of the army, both British and native, must be reduced to a perilous extent; famines, when they occur, must be allowed to take their course; works designed to prevent them must be in a great measure abandoned; the education of the people must be stopped; the police charges must be reduced, and the efficiency of the force diminished. The whole of the present administrative machinery must be replaced by a machinery less costly and less efficient. All this involves a heavy sacrifice, a sacrifice not to be lightly incurred—not to be incurred at all unless it can be shown that it is demanded by the plainest considerations of morality and of justice. Let us see how the actual facts stand, and how far they justify the denunciations of those who stigmatise the opium trade as a national sin.

The story of the trade in opium between India and China may be told in a few words. The common supposition is that the practice of opium-smoking among the Chinese (in China opium is smoked, it is not eaten) originated in the introduction of the drug into that country

by the East India Company ; but it appears to be an undoubted fact that the practice dates from a much earlier period. The cultivation of the poppy for the purpose of making opium is stated by one authority to have commenced in China upwards of two hundred years ago. By another it is said to have existed more than five hundred years. Mr. Watters, Her Majesty's Consul at Ichang, who has made careful inquiries on the spot into the origin of the practice of opium-smoking, asserts that in the west of China it had been indulged in for several hundred years, long before either the present reigning dynasty or foreign merchants and their opium were ever dreamt of.<sup>1</sup> In India the manufacture of opium was a Government monopoly under the Mahomedan rulers, and there are traditions of Indian opium having been exported from India into China by way of Thibet considerably more than a hundred years ago. It was also exported from India to China by sea by the Portuguese in the early part and middle of the last century. The trade of the East India Company in opium commenced rather more than a century ago, and has continued in the hands of private traders since 1834 up to the present time. When this trade commenced, the use of the drug was probably far more prevalent, as indeed it still seems to be, in Western than in Eastern China ; but we may be certain that it was not unknown in the eastern part of the empire, and that the trade first with the Portuguese, and subsequently with the British East India Company, originated in the fact that there was an effective demand in the eastern districts of China for a drug which had long been in use in the western districts. In 1800 the importation of the drug was prohibited by the Chinese Government ; but the prohibition was not attended by any diminution of the trade, which appears all along to have been connived at by the Chinese officials. During the forty years which followed, the prohibition was repeated more than once ; but, notwithstanding edicts against the importation and laws against the cultivation and manufacture of the drug, the use of opium continued in every class of Chinese society, with no attempt at secrecy either as to its sale or as to its consumption. In 1839 the first war between England and China commenced. In regard to the origin of this war there seems to be a good deal of misapprehension. It is commonly described as the ' opium war ; ' indeed, the Anti-opiumists often speak of both the wars with China as opium wars, because the incident which immediately led to the first of these wars was the confiscation and destruction by the Chinese authorities of a large quantity of opium, the property of British merchants. The first war might be more properly described as the silver war ; for it is well known that it was the exportation of silver in connection with the opium trade, rather than any objections to the trade upon moral grounds, that led to the measures which brought about the war. This is shown by the word-

<sup>1</sup> *The Finances and Public Works of India*, 1869-81, pp. 258-59.



ing of the edicts issued by the Chinese authorities, in which the prohibition was generally directed against the 'smuggling of opium and of sycee silver.' But the truth is that, opium or no opium, the mere fact of a nation like the English being engaged in trade with a nation like the Chinese was certain sooner or later to result in war. It would have been idle to expect that trade could be carried on for any length of time between the subjects of a civilised State and the subjects of a State which regarded and treated all foreigners as 'outer barbarians' and as 'foreign devils,' without things being done which were certain to lead to hostilities. Mr. Storrs Turner remarks that 'it was not China, but Britain which drew the sword,' and that 'there is no reason why China should not have been brought into the comity of nations as peaceably as was Japan.' To this it may be replied that, apart from the fact that the characters of the two nations differ in some essential features, it is highly probable that our two wars with China may have had some effect in preventing similar difficulties with the Japanese. And here I feel bound to notice the language in which the same writer characterises the first China war, which he describes as 'a series of hideous massacres.' Hitherto it has not been alleged, nor could the allegation have been made with truth, that there was anything in the conduct of the British troops in that war which was inconsistent with the usages of civilised warfare; and to denounce the war in such terms as those employed by Mr. Storrs Turner is simply a misuse of words.

Whatever the origin of the war may have been, the result of it was not, as many people suppose, to legalise the trade in opium. No provision for this purpose was introduced into the Treaty of Nankin. The opium trade continued after the war, as before the war, to be illegal and contraband; and so far were the British authorities from evincing any disposition, as Mr. Storrs Turner implies, to force it upon the Chinese, that shortly after the ratification of the Treaty in 1843 our plenipotentiary, Sir Henry Pottinger, issued a proclamation warning British merchants against attempting to import opium into any of the Chinese ports, and intimating that if they did so they would do it at their own risk, and would meet with no support or protection from Her Majesty's Consuls or other officers. Notwithstanding this warning the trade continued and steadily expanded until 1858, when it was legalised under the Treaty of Tientsin; the fact being that during the whole of those fifteen years the trade was connived at and encouraged by the Chinese authorities, who levied a duty upon opium as regularly as upon any article of the regular trade.

The second war with China, that which was followed by the Treaty of Tientsin, had nothing to do with the opium question. It originated in the seizure by the Chinese authorities of a vessel called the 'Arrow,' which had been registered as British. Whatever may have been the merits or demerits of the dispute, that war

had no connection with the opium trade; but when the war was over, and a fresh treaty was drawn up, it was felt that, looking to the past history of the opium traffic, and to the failure of the Chinese authorities to put a stop to it, it was very desirable that it should be legalised. When Lord Elgin was sent out to China in 1857, Lord Clarendon instructed him 'to ascertain whether the Government of China would revoke its prohibition of the opium trade which the high officers of the Chinese Government never practically enforce.' 'Whether,' wrote Lord Clarendon, 'the legalisation of the trade would tend to augment that trade may be doubtful, as it seems now to be carried on to the full extent of the demand in China with the sanction and connivance of the local authorities. But there would be obvious advantages in placing the trade upon a legal footing by the imposition of a duty, instead of its being carried on in the present irregular manner.' The result was that opium was inserted in the tariff framed in pursuance of the treaty; and thus it was made a legal article of commerce at those ports which were thrown open to British trade. The sale of the drug by the importer was, however, restricted to the ports. It was to be carried into the interior by Chinese only, and only as Chinese property. It is subject to additional duties, of the nature of transit duties, when taken into the interior; and from these duties, added to the import duty, the Chinese Government derives a revenue which is estimated at one million and a half a year.

India is not the only foreign country from which opium is sent to China. It is sent from Persia and also from Turkey, but to a small extent, and of an inferior quality as compared with the Indian drug. In China itself the cultivation and manufacture of opium are said to have been steadily increasing of late years; and it is sometimes argued that for this reason the revenue which the Government of India derive from the drug is so precarious that in the interests of India, as well as in those of China, it would be wise to suppress the trade, and to devise some more stable mode of raising a revenue equal to that which is now drawn from opium. In 1871 one of the Anglo-Indian witnesses examined before the Parliamentary Committee already referred to, expressed a confident opinion that the opium revenue would be less in the decade then commencing than it had been in the previous decade. This anticipation has not been realised. The aggregate net revenue derived from opium during the ten years ending on the 31st March 1881 exceeded by 11,632,165*l.* the aggregate net revenue yielded by the trade during the ten years which ended on the 31st March 1871. The net receipts from opium during the earlier of these decades was 58,909,635*l.*, while the net receipts during the later period were 70,541,800*l.*

It is always unsafe to prophesy, but so far as it is possible to form a judgment from experience, the probabilities would seem to be



opposed to any considerable diminution of the Indian opium revenue, unless the opposition to it in this country shall be allowed to prevail.

The foregoing brief summary of the rise, progress, and present position of the opium trade may possibly serve to correct some misconceptions which still exist in regard to matters of fact bearing upon that trade. The trade is the natural result of the capacity of the soil and climate of certain parts of India to produce a drug for which there is, and long has been, a demand in China, and to produce it of a quality which better suits the taste of the Chinese than that which they have been able to produce in their own country or to procure from elsewhere. It cannot be said that the legalisation of the trade was forced or even pressed by the British Government upon the Chinese until it had been proved by the experience of many years that, notwithstanding the prohibitions periodically issued by the Government of China against the importation of opium, the people of China were determined to have it, and that the traffic was not only connived at, but was encouraged by the officers of that Government. These facts are in no way affected by the view that may be taken of the two wars which England has waged against China. The first war, which was the only war fought in connection with opium, was not followed by any attempt on our part to force opium upon the Chinese. Had the authorities in China been sincere in their desire to put down the trade, it might have been stopped immediately after the ratification of the Treaty of Nankin. The second war had nothing to do with opium; but when peace was made, and when the time came for revising our commercial relations with the Chinese, it was not unreasonable that our Government should bring under consideration a trade which it was impossible to ignore, which, as carried on, was a scandal, and which, unless it could be stopped altogether, it was for the interests of both countries to place upon a legal footing. Nor were the British Government singular in holding this view. The same view was held and was pressed upon Lord Elgin by the American Minister in China, who, distrusting the possibility of any really effective prohibition of the traffic, mainly, as he said, 'through the inveterate appetite of the Chinese,' recommended that the Chinese Government should be persuaded 'to put such high duties on the drug as will restrain the supply, regulate the import, and yet not stimulate some other form of import with or without the connivance of the Chinese.'

The practical questions which the people of England have to consider in connection with this matter are: first, whether the evils resulting from the use of opium, as practised by the Chinese, so far transcend the evils resulting in other countries from the use of stimulants of other kinds, as to compel us, on grounds of public justice and morality, to impose upon India the heavy loss which would ensue

from the suppression of the opium cultivation; secondly, whether, supposing that sacrifice to be made by India, it would have the desired effect in suppressing, or greatly diminishing, the use of the drug in China. On both these points there is a good deal of information to be found in the evidence taken by the Parliamentary Committee of 1871. On neither of them does that evidence appear to be such as to justify the measure which the opponents of the opium trade are urging upon the Government. Granted that the effects of the drug, when used to excess, are most lamentable, and are even more prejudicial to health than the excessive use of alcohol—though on this latter point there is much room for difference of opinion—it has certainly not been shown that, as a matter of fact, opium is more injurious to the great body of the Chinese opium-smokers than are spirituous liquors and beer to the great body of those who use stimulants in this or any other European country. It is difficult to exaggerate the amount of poverty and suffering and evil of every kind which is caused in this country by drink; but it has never been seriously proposed to suppress the importation or manufacture of brandy, or gin, or beer, because, when taken in excess, they produce drunkenness, and often lead to crime. And here it may be remarked that the excessive use of opium does not produce those crimes of violence which are the every-day results of drunkenness in England. I have not space to deal at any length with the evidence which has been recorded on this important question of the actual effects of the use of opium upon the Chinese; but I may briefly draw attention to that given by Mr. Winchester, one of the witnesses examined in 1871. Mr. Winchester had been British Consul at Shanghai, and had resided in China for twenty-six years. He was by no means disposed to minimise the mischievous effects of opium. When questioned on this point by Sir Wilfrid Lawson, he replied emphatically that he would ‘not recommend any man to smoke opium under any circumstances. At the same time he stated that ‘while there was a stage of opium-smoking in which unquestionably the effects were very deteriorating to the physical constitution,’ his impression was that ‘a certain amount of opium was not so.’ In his opinion ‘there are two conditions of opium-smoking. There is what you might call the moderate opium-smoking, and there is that stage which I would call opiumism, as being equivalent to what may be called alcoholism.’ He felt sure that a Chinaman might continue to use opium, as we use wine or beer in this country, without ever being induced to use it to excess. He knew ‘men in China, advanced in life, who had smoked opium all their lives, and who were perfectly competent to all the duties of their position.’ He had seen the Chinese in the Straits Settlements and in California, all of whom smoke opium, and on the whole are ‘a useful people, and a laborious, diligent population.’ Adverting to the fact that large tracts in China



consist of great alluvial valleys, which are in most cases malarious, he expressed the opinion that the foundation of the habit of opium-smoking was the temptation to relieve the maladies to which the Chinese were subject owing to the malarious character of the climate in many localities.

Mr. Winchester's evidence affords strong corroboration to the opinions lately expressed by Sir George Birdwood and by Dr. Moore, based upon their experience of the effects of opium upon the natives of Rájputana and the adjoining districts in India. Dr. Moore, who served for many years in that part of India, where the practice of taking opium is extremely prevalent among natives of all ranks, expresses a decided opinion that while 'opium taken in excess is undoubtedly injurious,' it is 'not more injurious than alcohol taken in excess,' and that 'when taken in moderation it is not injurious.' 'Daily evidence,' he writes, 'sufficiently proves that it is often or continuously administered to children without the latter being very much the worse for it; and that grown-up people may take it without injury for years—may even, under certain circumstances and at certain times, consume it with advantage. The physiological fact seems to be that opium, when taken into the system, acts in some respects very much as alcohol.' 'Those using opium in this part of the country do not, as a general rule, indulge in alcohol. Of course there are many who take opium, as there are those taking alcohol, immoderately, and simply as a means of intoxication; but he must be a bold man who dare fling a stone at the majority of persons using opium, at least in this part of the country. When taken by the camel-feeders in the sandy deserts of Western Rájputana, it is used to enable the men, far away from towns or even from desert villages, to subsist on scanty food, and to bear without injury the excessive cold of the desert winter night and the scorching rays of the desert sun. When used by the impoverished ryot it occupies the void resulting from insufficient food, or pure food deficient in the necessary elementary substances; and it not only affords the ill-nourished cultivator, unable to procure or store liquor, a taste of that exhilaration of spirits which arises from good wine, but also enables him to undergo his daily fatigue with far less waste of time than would otherwise occur. To the Kossid (a native runner) again, obliged to travel a long distance, it is invaluable. In short, it is the abuse and not the use of opium which must be credited with the undoubted deleterious results of immoderate indulgence of the practice of either eating or smoking the drug.'

On the question of the possibility of suppressing the use of opium in China by the withdrawal of the Indian drug, the evidence of Mr. Winchester was even more emphatic than his evidence as to the effects of the practice of opium-smoking. When asked whether it would be a great calamity to the Chinese, if opium were to be with-



drawn from them altogether, he replied that the hypothesis involved a physical impossibility; and, when further pressed, he stated that his 'mind could not estimate the result of facts which it considered to be impossible.' Nearly eleven years have elapsed since this evidence was given, but the subsequent course of events has shown that it is quite as applicable to the situation in 1882 as it was to the situation in 1871. During the interval the cultivation of the drug in China has steadily increased, and even the Chinese ministers who still profess a desire to suppress opium-smoking admit, as Sir Thomas Wade reported last year, that the habit is too confirmed to be stopped by official intervention.<sup>2</sup> There cannot now be the shadow of a doubt that if the exportation of the drug from India were entirely suppressed, the expansion of the cultivation of opium in China, combined with the impetus which the demand for the Indian drug would speedily give to the exportation of opium from other countries, such as Persia, Turkey, and Mozambique, in no very great space of time would fill up the gap caused by the suppression of the Indian opium trade; a result which would hardly be more satisfactory to those who are now intent upon destroying the trade, than it would be to the perplexed administrators of Indian finance.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Finance and Public Works of India*, 1869-1881, p. 255.

